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Iconizing the Daoist-Buddhist Relationship: Cliff Sculptures in Sichuan during the Reign of Tang Xuanzong*

Christine Mollier

Abstract

This essay focuses on a specific type of dual Daoist and Buddhist iconography found in cliff sculptures in Sichuan. It examines the visual and epigraphical evidence of three major sites where paired images of Śākyamuni and Laojun

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Christine Mollier is a research scholar specializing in the history of medieval Daoism at the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS). She holds a Ph.D. in Asian Studies from the University of Paris 7, and was a member of the French research group on Dunhuang manuscripts. She is the author of *Une apocalypse du Ve siècle: Le Livre des incantations divines des grottes abyssales* (Paris 1990), awarded the Stanislas Julien Prize of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 1991. She now belongs to the Center of Research on the Civilizations of East Asia (CNRS, CRCAO, Paris). Her work focuses on medieval Daoist eschatology, Dunhuang manuscripts, Buddho-Taoist literature, talismans, and iconography. Her most recent major publication is *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, ritual, and iconographic exchange in medieval China* (University of Hawaii Press, 2008), awarded the Stanislas Julien Prize of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 2008.

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(or Tianzun) as well as other Daoist/Buddhist compositions are particularly prominent: the Daoist cliff of the Xuanmiao monastery (Xuanmiao guan 玄妙觀) in Anyue 安岳, the Buddhist cliffs of the Feixian Pavilion (Feixian ge 飛仙閣) in Pujiang 蒲江, and the Daoist cliff of Niujiaozhai 牛角寨 in Renshou county 仁壽縣. Significantly, the inscriptions and steles that are preserved in situ demonstrate that all the Daoist/Buddhist combinations of images depicted in these sites were made during the same period, namely under the reign of Tang Xuanzong (r. 712–756 C.E.) who favored Daoism as a state religion. These local examples clearly reflect the politico-religious ideology that then prevailed. The hypothesis that is advanced here is that this specific imagery can be interpreted as a visual expression of the revival of the *huahu* 化胡 (conversion of the barbarians) theory at that time. Both epigraphy and iconology lend their support to this interpretation. The Buddhist and Daoist icons in these compositions are of equal dimensions and are posed symmetrically, but their positions relative to one another—the Buddhist images being consistently situated to the right of the Daoist—indicate an intention to underline Daoism's superiority over its rival. Far from being arbitrary, this left/right iconographic convention appears to be based on the doctrine of "the religion of the left (yang) and the religion of the right (yin)" elaborated by early Daoism to define its relationship to Buddhism. Created less than half a century after all *huahu* depictions had been officially banned in the Empire, these images of Śākyamuni and Laojun seated side by side, in spite of their seemingly moderate and "ecumenical" demeanor, could certainly never have been exhibited if it were not for the pro-Daoist religious policies of Tang Xuanzong.

Keywords: Buddho-Daoism, iconography, Sichuan, Tang Xuanzong, *huahu*

The sculpted steles of Mount Yaowang 藥王山 (Yaoxian 耀縣), located some 100 kilometers north of modern Xi'an, have been highlighted in medieval Chinese art history as well as Daoist scholarship during the past two decades.[1] These Northern Wei dynasty (386–534 C.E.) artifacts

[1] This has mostly followed the publication of Zhang Yan 張燕 and Zhao Chao 趙超, *Beichao fodao zaoxiangbei jingxuan* 北朝佛道造像碑精選 (Tianjin: Guji chubanshe, 1996). Examples include Kamitsuka Yoshiko 神塚淑子 (1993); Stanley K. Abe, "Heterological Visions: Northern Wei Daoist Sculpture from Shaanxi Province," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 9 (1996–97): 69–83; and Stanley K. Abe, *Ordinary Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 281–313; Stephen

bear some of the oldest extant anthropomorphic figurations of Daoist deities.[2] Although they are not the main topic of the present essay, a brief review of what is known about them serves as useful background for the consideration of the Buddho-Daoist cliff sculptures of Sichuan that are our major concern here.

The Yaoxian steles demonstrate that fifth-century Daoist believers in north China, though borrowing from Buddhist iconographical conventions, had developed a distinct visual language to depict their divinities and had, therefore, put an end to the two centuries of aniconism allegedly advocated by the Daoist orthodoxy. Lord Lao (Laojun, the deified Laozi) was typically endowed with attributes that included a topknot, a beard, a long-sleeved robe with a V-shaped collar and straps, and an accessory in his right hand such as a fan or a flywhisk. Sometimes a tripod armrest (*yinji* 隱几) was placed in front of the figure as well. These iconographic features, it will be seen, remained notably stable in the materials to be examined below. The dedicatory inscriptions and the lists of the donors' names incised on the Yaoxian votive steles have permitted researchers to glimpse their sociohistorical background as well. Most of them were commissioned by the collective membership of a clan or by groups of male and female practitioners belonging to lay religious associations, either on behalf of deceased parents and ancestors or for the welfare and prosperity of the faithful. Above all, however, it is the enigmatic fusion of Buddhist and Daoist icons characterizing some of these steles that has become a focus of scholarly attention.

R. Bokenkamp "The Yao Boduo Stele as Evidence for 'Dao-Buddhism,'" *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 9 (1996–97): 54–67; Ishimatsu Hinako 石松日奈子, "Gibunrôzôzôhi no nendai ni tsuite" 魏文朗造像碑の年代について, *Bukkyô geijutsu* 佛教藝術 240 (1998): 13–32; Stephen Little and Shawn Eichman, *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago and Berkeley: The Art Institute of Chicago and University of California Press, 2000): 163–171; Li Song 李松, *Chang'an yishu yu zongjiao wenming* 長安藝術與宗教文明 [Arts and Religious Civilization of Chang'an] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 439–451; Dorothy Wong, *Chinese Steles: Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Use of Symbolic Form* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 105–20; and Hu Wenhe, "Shaanxi Bei Wei dao(fo)jiao zaoxiangbei, shileixing he xingxiang zaoxing tanjiu" 陝西北魏道(佛)教造像碑石類型和型象造型探究, *Kaogu yu Wenwu* 4 (2007): 64–77.

[2] These are dated to the period from 424 to 533.

The oldest stele, named for its main donor, Wei Wenlang 魏文朗, and dating to the first year of the reign of Shiguang 始光 of the Northern Wei (424 C.E.), has been an object of considerable comment in particular.[3] Approximately 130 centimeters tall, the stele shows Daoist and Buddhist images on each of its four sides, and the main arched niche in its front portrays a pair of seated deities, similar in size and posture, who can be easily identified as the Buddha Śākyamuni and Laojun (figures 1–2). Śākyamuni, with his long ears and *uṣṇiṣa* (cranial protuberance), wears a monastic robe draped over his right arm and raises his right hand in the *abhaya* mudrā. To his right, the bearded Laojun, with his topknot and long-sleeved Chinese dress, holds an object (probably a flywhisk or a fan) in his right hand, while his left hand rests on his knee. Śākyamuni and Laojun are flanked by two attendants with hands raised in adoring attitudes. At the bottom of the stele, the portraits and names of donors are incised (six men and five women), as is a small *boshan* 博山 incense burner in the middle.

Other, slightly later, steles from Yaoxian also feature combinations of Buddhist and Daoist deities. The iconographical motif of Laojun and the Buddha seated side by side apparently remained popular during the period of the Northern Qi 北齊 (550–577 C.E.) and the Northern Zhou 北周 (577–581 C.E.). In spite of some stylistic variations, the two deities are always clearly differentiated and may be identified by their specific costumes and appearance. According to art historians, analogous depictions of twin-figured images seated side by side existed already in fifth-century Buddhist art, for example, the dual icons of Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna, or Vimalakīrti and Manjuśrī. Still, while such double images appear iconographically consistent with Buddhist canonical references—even if the icons as we know them were uniquely Chinese creations—the paired depictions of Śākyamuni and Laojun from Yaowang shan appear, by contrast, to be anomalous and hence have come to be questioned by modern scholars. Several divergent interpretations have been advanced in the effort to explain the equipoised presence of the two most prestigious deities of the Buddhist and the Daoist pantheons. Some have found here the expression of a consciously hybrid approach, the fruit of a synthesis between the two religions, and the manifestation of

[3] The dating of this stele has been a subject of controversy. See Ishimatsu, "Gibunrôzôzôhi no nendai ni tsuite" and Li, *Chang'an yishu*, 439–451.

their mutual tolerance. The fusion of Buddhist and Daoist iconography has also been seen as reflecting the ignorance of "the ordinary people, who may not have understood or been concerned with such differentiation."[4] Stephen Bokenkamp, for his part, interpreted some of the Yaoxian steles as exemplifying Lingbao Daoism's willingness to absorb Buddhism.[5] Other scholars have proposed a radically opposite reading, arguing that the dual Buddho-Daoist imagery of the Wei Wenlang stele might in fact be a work commissioned by Buddhist adherents wishing to express their faith in their own religion. According to this line of thought, the term *fodao* 佛道 found in the dedication on the reverse side, rather than denoting some blending of Buddhism and Daoism, was used to signify the "Buddhist path," that is, Buddhism.[6] It will not be our task here to attempt to contribute further to the issues surrounding the interpretation of the icons from Yaowang shan, and, though the iconographical continuity will be evident, it will remain an open question as to what bearing the evidence to be derived from the analogous materials from Sichuan may have upon our understanding of the Yaoxian steles.

Dual Images of the Buddha and Laojun in Sichuan

We must stress at the outset that the Yaoxian twin images of Śākyamuni and Laojun are far from unique. In reality, they are only the oldest extant samples, or perhaps the prototypes, of an iconography that resurfaced when Daoist art reached its full maturity during the mid-Tang period.[7] Among the numerous cliff carvings in present-day Sichuan province (including Chongqingshi) scattered over many areas of this vast region, one finds combinations of Śākyamuni and Laojun (or a Daoist Tianzun)

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4 Liu Yang 柳楊, "Śākyamuni and Laojun Seated Side by Side; Catching a Glimpse of Northern Dynastics Buddhist/Taoist Relationship from a Popular Iconography," in *Ancient Taoist Art from Shanxi Province*, ed. Susan Y. Y. Lam (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 2003), 60.

5 Bokenkamp, "Yao Boduo Stele."

6 Abe, "Heterological Visions," 73–76; Abe, *Ordinary Images*, 298–313.

7 An earlier example of this type of Buddho-Daoist cliff sculpture is apparently found in Shaanxi province, in the sixth-century site of Fudi 福地. See Li, *Chang'an yishu*, 471–472.

seated side by side, as well as other Daoist/Buddhist compositions.[8]

Sichuan preserves large numbers of stone reliefs, more than any other part of China, attesting to intensive artistic and religious activities in the area during medieval times. During the Tang period, in particular, thousands of Buddhist images were carved, and Daoist statues, though to a lesser extent, multiplied in this region which, since the organization of the Way of the Heavenly Master (Tianshi dao 天師道) in the second century of the Common Era, always promoted itself as the cradle of Daoism.

Among the sites in Sichuan that I have visited during the past few years, I have located about half a dozen that contain paired depictions of Śākyamuni with a Daoist Tianzun. Significantly, these dual compositions are mainly found in Daoist sites, but a few examples are also known from Buddhist iconographic contexts. Significantly, too, all of them were made during the same period, namely, the highly pro-Daoist regime of Tang Xuanzong 唐玄宗 (r. 712–756). Mirroring the characteristic refinement of religious art during the period, some of these symmetrical arrangements are set in niches that are more majestic, more complex (with numerous attendants and guardians), and larger (up to almost two meters) than those adorning the sculpted steles of previous periods. Nonetheless, the remarkable iconographic continuity of this specific imagery cannot be ignored: the eighth-century compositions, like the Yaoxian steles, typically present the two deities seated next to one another and surrounded by a careful balance of Buddhist and Daoist figures. Śākyamuni and Laojun are of equal dimensions, but with distinct costumes and hairstyles. As in the Yaoxian steles, the different garb of the two deities discloses their identities: Śākyamuni is characterized by his *uṣṇiṣa* and Indian-style monastic garment, while Laojun (or Tianzun) sports a chignon, beard, and long-sleeved, V-necked Chinese dress. As we shall see, during Tang Xuanzong's reign other types of Daoist/Buddhist depictions were also produced in Sichuan.

It seems to me evident that the coexistence of Daoist and Buddhist images in these Tang dynasty sites in Sichuan cannot be interpreted as an eclectic amalgamation of various icons. On the contrary, like other

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[8] On the basis of the iconographical data that have so far become available to me, it is not clear precisely how Laojun and other Daoist Tianzun(s) are to be differentiated in the contexts with which I am here concerned.

iconographic motifs, these images were likely chosen according to the religious affiliations of the lay devotees or clerics who sponsored them, affiliations that can be verified not only on the basis of the sculptures themselves but also thanks to the epigraphic testimony preserved in situ. One can only speculate on the intentions that brought into being works of sculpture featuring Laojun and Śākyamuni side by side, as well as other Daoist/Buddhist iconographic combinations, but the politico-religious conjunctions undergirding these depictions might, by contrast, be specified.

My argument focuses on visual evidence, inscriptions, and steles from three major sites that, in different ways, shed light on the Daoist/Buddhist iconographic problematic in Sichuan during Tang Xuanzong's reign. Two of these sites are Daoist: the Xuanmiao guan 玄妙觀 of Anyue 安岳 and the Daoist cliff of Niujiaozhai 牛角寨 in Renshou county 仁壽縣. The third is the Buddhist Feixian Pavilion 飛仙閣 of Pujiang 蒲江.

The Xuanmiao Guan

The Xuanmiao guan 玄妙觀 is located about twenty kilometers northwest of the town of Anyue 安岳, in southeast Sichuan.[9] It is one of numerous impressive sculpted cliffs in Anyue, most of which are dedicated to Buddhism. The Xuanmiao temple was built during Xuanzong's reign, most likely as part of one of the two main networks of state-sponsored Daoist temples that were established in the two capitals (Chang'an and Luoyang) as well as in each prefecture of the country at the emperor's order. The first of these networks consisted of the Kaiyuan 開元 Daoist temples that, like the official Buddhist Kaiyuan monasteries, were founded following a decree issued during the year 738 of the Kaiyuan

[9] Wang Jiayou 王家祐, *Daojiao lungao* 道教論稿 (Chengdu: Bashu chubanshe, 1987), 52–54; Yusa Noboru, "Tōdai ni mirareru Kyūku tenson shinkō ni tsuite" 唐代に見られる救苦天尊信仰について, *Tōhōshūkyō* 東方宗教 73 (1989): 43–94; Hu Wenhe 胡文和, *Sichuan daojiao fojiao shiku yishu* (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1994), 9–11 and 78–79; Liu Changjiu 劉長久, *Anyue shiku yishu* 安岳石窟藝術 [The Grotto Art in Anyue] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1997), 49–50.

開元 era (713–741).[10] The second imperial network of Daoist temples to which the Xuanmiao guan of Anyue might have belonged was created after the decree, adopted in 741, that regrouped the Ancestral Temples of the Emperor of Mysterious Origin (Xuanyuan Huangdi miao 玄元皇帝廟), named from the honorary title granted to Laojun.

The buildings of the Anyue Xuanmiao guan have entirely disappeared, but the neighboring circular cliff, whose carvings were also completed during the Kaiyuan and the following Tianbao 天寶 (742–756) eras, have been preserved in spite of the ravages of time and history, as I could see during a visit to the site in October 2001. This large rock outcropping, with a circumference of approximately forty-three meters, incorporates some seventy-nine niches with more than twelve hundred sculptures of different sizes. A commemorative stele (2 m 40 cm × 1 m 27 cm) of about a thousand characters and dated 748, which has survived in situ, offers testimony concerning the creation of the site. It indicates that several niches were cut during the year 730 (the eighteenth year of the Kaiyuan era) and that a major new carving project, in fact the second one, was carried out in 748.[11]

Among the imposing Daoist compositions displayed on this cliff is the "Niche of Laojun" (Laojun kan 老君龕; niche 11) with a seated Taishang Laojun, 1.2 meters high, surrounded by thirteen attendants, male and female (figure 3). Another remarkable statue is a near life-sized Heavenly Venerable Savior from Suffering (niche 62), who is

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[10] James Benn, "Religious Aspects of Emperor Hsüan-tsung's Taoist Ideology," in *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society: Buddhist and Taoist Studies II*, ed. David W. Chappell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 127–145, 132–133; Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism under the Tang* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 53–54.

[11] See the complete transcription of the stele (unfortunately in simplified characters) given in Chen Yuan 陳垣, *Daojia jinshelue* 道家金石略 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), 142–143; and by Hu Wenhe, *Sichuan daojiao*, 9. See also the partial transcriptions by Wang Jiayou, *Daojiao lungao*, 52–53; and by Yusa, "Tōdai ni mirareru," 25. For a brief study of the stele, see also Liu Yi 劉屹, "Tangdai daojiao de 'Huahu' jingshuo yu 'Daobenlun'" 唐代道教的「化胡」經說與「道本論」, in *Tangdai zongjiao xinyang yu shehui* 唐代宗教信仰與社會 (Beijing daxue sheng Tang yanjiu congshu), ed. Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2003), 84–124, 120–121.

described in the 748 stele as the "Jiuku tianzun standing on nine dragons" (*Jiukutianzun cheng jiulong* 救苦天尊乘九龍) (figure 4).[12] But of most interest in our present context are the several niches combining images of Śākyamuni and a Daoist Tianzun (perhaps Laojun) seated together. Most of these niches are small (about 60 to 70 centimeters high) (figures 5–6) and carved among similar small niches dedicated to Laojun.[13] All of the statues have been disfigured, but the two deities are clearly differentiated by their garb and hairstyles.

The cliff also displays two larger, more elaborate niches enclosing similar paired icons. One is niche 63, located next to the Laojun kan (figure 7). It measures about one meter cubed. Śākyamuni and, to his left, a Daoist Tianzun are sitting on lotus thrones with square peduncles, their heads encircled by haloes. A disciple and a bodhisattva are standing on the Buddha's right. In symmetry, the Daoist Tianzun is escorted on his left by two attendants, male and female. In the lower section, underneath the niche, disciples, lions, and two donors are incised on each side of a *boshan* incense burner, a motif that resembles the one depicted beneath the sculpted Buddho-Daoist composition of the Wei Wenlang stele from Yaowang shan. Another large niche (160 cm high, 190 cm wide, and 130 cm deep) dedicated to Śākyamuni and the Daoist Tianzun is number 75 (figures 8–9). Here, the two are seated on rectangular thrones, with a three-footed armrest (*yinji*) placed in front of the Daoist deity. We may note, too, that the sculpted band located in the upper section of this niche presents ten seated Daoist Tianzun 天尊 about twenty centimeters in height, with nimbuses around their heads, who can be compared to the ten standing Tianzun of the Feixian ge cliff of Pujiang that is examined later.

The centrality, impressive dimensions, and perfect integration of these two large niches within the cliff wall leave no doubt but that they were not superimpositions or later additions; they were carved together with the major neighboring Daoist figures when these were executed as part of the large-scale Daoist projects of the eighth century. The inclusion

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[12] On the emergence of the cult of Jiuku tianzun, see Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 174–207.

[13] Hu Wenhe, *Sichuan daojiao*, 79, mentions niches 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30.

of such Daoist/Buddhist compositions within this coherent Daoist iconographic program must therefore have been the result of a deliberate choice on the part of the sculptures' patrons and designers. To understand their decisions, one has to turn back to the commemorative stele of 748.

According to its title, the stele was "erected on the imperial order of the great Tang in the scenic spot of the Xuanmiao temple on Mount Jisheng" (*Qi da Tang yuli Jishengshan Xuanmiao guan shengjing bei* 啟大唐御立集聖山玄妙觀勝境碑), and the last column of the text indicates that it dates to the seventh year of the Tianbao era (大唐天寶七載), 748 C.E. It was commissioned on behalf of a Daoist adept as a memorial to his dead parents. Not surprisingly, several phrases, still decipherable in the eroded inscription, are intended to praise the Daoist tradition and allude to the florescence of Daoism, to its mythical origins with Pangu 盤古 and Laozi. The text also emphasizes the historical relations of Daoism with both the emperor Ming di 明帝 (57–75 C.E.) of the Han dynasty and Tang Xuanzong. Most pertinent in the present context, however, are the few phrases that lend an ideological flavor to the otherwise gentle apologetic content of the text. One finds, first of all, a reference to the well-known legend according to which Laozi left China for the Western countries after revealing his *Daode jing* in "five thousand characters" to Yin Xi 尹喜, the Guardian of the Pass. Then, notably, the priority and preeminence of Daoism over other religious traditions, particularly Buddhism, are clearly underlined. The text reads,

> The Supreme Dao, through cycles and transformations, has given birth to heaven and earth, as well as to Buddhism 無上道而輪化生天地而生佛.

We then read,

> Daoism is the ancestor of the Three Teachings 道是三教祖也.

These two short statements make clear that the eighth-century Daoist adepts who sponsored the sculptures at the Xuanmiao guan considered Buddhism to be a by-product of Daoism, an assertion that is supported by allusion to the "conversion of the barbarians" (*huahu* 化胡) theory.[14] Although the term *huahu* is not explicitly used here, the tale of Laozi's travels in central Asia and the Indian subcontinent, where he transformed

[14] See Liu Yi, "Tangdai daojiao," 120–121, who gives a similar interpretation of these sentences.

himself into Śākyamuni to preach the alternative, more accessible, teaching of Buddhism, is clearly suggested. Buddhism should be, consequently, regarded as a foreign form of Daoism, in short the "Daoist religion of the barbarians."[15]

Additional evidence provided by the 748 stele confirms this hypothesis. This is found not in the text of the stele but in its ornamentation. The remarkable central motif carved in the upper section of the stone depicts the Buddha and the Daoist Tianzun seated next to one another inside a horseshoe-shaped niche (figure 10), a motif that closely resembles the dual images of the cliff surveyed above. It should be underscored that this material evidence has never been noticed by historians, for the simple reason that the relief image does not show on rubbings of the stele.[16] In the light of the stele's text passages just examined, the message conveyed by these dual depictions becomes clear. They may be interpreted as visual reminders that, being originally a branch of the great Chinese religious tradition, the omnipresent Buddhist religion had rightfully a place within Daoism, although its auxiliary status should not be overlooked.

The Feixian Pavilion

The second site in Sichuan that advances our reflections on mid-Tang period Buddhist/Daoist iconography is the Feixian Pavilion 飛仙閣 of Pujiang 蒲江, about 140 kilometers southwest of Chengdu. Here, the problem presents itself from a completely different angle as the site is predominantly and originally Buddhist. Some one hundred Buddhist sculptural groups are carved in the Feixian ge's cliffs (figure 11).[17] Two

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[15] To borrow the expression of Anna Seidel, "Le Sûtra merveilleux du Ling-pao suprême, traitant de Lao-tseu qui convertit les barbares (le manuscrit S. 2081)," in *Contribution aux études de Touen-houang*, vol. 3, ed. Michel Soymié (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1984), 305–352, 332.

[16] See, for example, a reproduction of this rubbing in Hu Wenhe, *Zhongguo daojiao shike yishu shi* 中國道教石刻藝術史, 2 vols. (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe 高等教育出版社, 2004), 65.

[17] See Angela Howard, "Buddhist Sculpture of Pujiang, Sichuan: A Mirror of the Direct Link Between Southwest China and India in High Tang," *Archives of Asian Art: The Asia Society* 42 (1989): 49–61; Henrik H. Sørensen, "The Buddhist

inscriptions mentioning the reign of the Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (684–704) confirm that this large carving project was undertaken at the end of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth century,[18] with work continuing down to the mid-tenth century. The chaotic organization of the site with its groups of deities, which crowd one another for space, has been underlined by art historians.[19] What draws our attention here, however, is the presence, within what is otherwise an entirely Buddhist site, of a few small Daoist niches as well as Buddhist/Daoist compositions.

One of these compositions (niche 2; figure 12) is located on the eastern side of the main cliff and shows the two deities unusually seated in the reverse of their common position, for here Laojun is seated to the Buddha's right. I have found no mention of this sculpture in either Chinese or Western studies dedicated to the Feixian ge, and I suspect that this is because this niche, hidden on the wall of the cliff, was not evident to visitors. Niche 18 on the Feixian ge north cliff also contains an image of Śākyamuni and the Daoist Tianzun seated side by side (figure 13). The niche is carved high on the wall, which makes it difficult to examine and photograph. Moreover, like many of the other eighth-century niches at this site, the images are weathered and in a poor state of conservation. One can nonetheless distinguish the Buddha in monk's robes and a Daoist Tianzun to his left. Each figure is about seventy-four centimeters high and is escorted by a pair of attendants whose heads are circled with flame-shaped haloes. The bodhisattvas next to the Buddha wear ornaments and crowns, while the attendants to the Tianzun's left are dressed in long-sleeved gowns and are wearing shoes. On both sides

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Sculptures at Feixian Pavillion in Pujiang, Sichuan," *Artibus Asiae* 58, no. 1/2 (1998): 33–67; Hu Wenhe, *Zhongguo daojiao*, 2:29.

[18] One inscription, which is dedicated to the Empress Wu Zetian, bears the date "fifth month of the first year of Yongchang 永昌," which corresponds to 689 C.E. It is incised inside the large niche 60 that contains a majestic image of the Crowned Buddha. The other barely legible inscription dated to Wu Zetian's time is found on the wall of the large niche 55 containing images of three bodhisattvas. It includes the date "first year of Jiushi 久視," corresponding to 700 C.E. See Hu Wenhe, *Sichuan daojiao*, 19; Liu Changjiu, *Zhongguo xinan shiku yishu* 中國西南石窟藝術 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1998), 45; Sørensen, "Buddhist Sculptures," 61–62.

[19] Sørensen, "Buddhist Sculptures," 35–36, 61.

of the niche, there are two standing donors and, on each side at the front, a pair of guardians. Because none of these dual images is accompanied by an inscription, we have no information about their specific devotional or votive purposes.

To explain how this type of Buddhist/Daoist iconography came to be introduced into an otherwise Buddhist sculptural environment, one has to examine two small Daoist niches found in the main cliff of the Feixian ge, among the Buddhist carvings, both of which in this case are accompanied by inscriptions. One of these, number 74 (figure 14), is engraved at ground level together with similarly small Buddhist niches. According to the very damaged inscription incised on its left side, its central deity is the "Heavenly Venerable of Eternal Happiness" (長樂天尊). The image, forty-one centimeters in height, is seated on a lotus throne, escorted by two attendants. The deity wears a Daoist costume and holds a tablet in front of his chest. The inscription is dated to the "twenty-eighth year of Kaiyuan" (開元二十八年), which corresponds to 732 C.E.

More prominent still is the second niche, numbered 44 and carved midway up the cliff, just beneath a one-meter-high Buddhist niche (number 45) sheltering the Seven Buddhas (figures 15–16). This Daoist group consists of ten standing deities, 25 centimeters high, carved on a 109-centimeter-wide plinth.[20] They are shown facing forward, standing on lotus-shaped pedestals. Their faces have disappeared, but the mandorlas surrounding their heads are still visible. They wear long-sleeved official vestments and shoes, and each figure performs different hand gestures or carries various accessories, such as fans (as do the third and eighth deities from the right). The inscription incised on the flat surface at the base of the images identifies them as Tianzun 天尊 and indicates that the carving was commissioned by a high-ranking Daoist, named Jia Guangzong 賈光宗 and titled *daoshi* of the Three Grottoes (Sandong daoshi 三洞道士), on behalf of his deceased Master (*shizhu* 師主) during the "ninth year of Tianbao" (天寶九載), that is, 750. Several characters of the inscription are difficult to decipher, and it has been transcribed and interpreted in

[20] Hu Wenhe, *Zhongguo daojiao* 2:29; Sørensen, "Buddhist Sculptures," 59; Hu Zhifan 胡知凡, *Xingshenjumiao—Daojiao zaoxiang yishu tansuo* 形神俱妙—道教造像藝術探索 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2008), 107–108.

various ways.[21] According to my own tentative reading, given here, it seems that the dead Daoist Master on behalf of whom the image was made belonged to a Baiyun Temple (Baiyun guan 白雲觀) of the Qiong 邛 district (the ancient name of Pujiang county).[22]

The icons of the sculpture accord well with the mortuary function of this dedicatory inscription, for the ten Tianzun are likely to be identified as the decamorphic manifestations of the Heavenly Venerable Savior from Suffering (Jiuku tianzun 救苦天尊).[23] Other iconographically similar depictions of these ten Tianzun exist in Sichuan—for example, those approximately one meter tall standing beneath the Laojun kan (niche 11) at the Xuanmiao guan of Anyue and dating therefore to the same period.[24]

Although the evidence is scant, niches 74 and 44 of Feixian ge's main cliff demonstrate that, during the reign of Emperor Tang Xuanzong, Daoist

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[21] Hu Zhifan, *Xingshenjumiao*, 108, gives a transcription of the inscription similar to mine, with the exception of the name of the Daoist monastery, which he reads Baihe guan 百鶴觀 instead of Baiyun guan. According to Liu Changjiu, *Zhongguo xinan shiku yishu*, 45, who also gives a transcription of the inscription, these images of the ten Tianzun were commissioned by a certain Hu Lingji 扈靈寂 on behalf of his dead Daoist master. Sørensen, "Buddhist Sculptures," 67, gives a slightly different transcription of the inscription, and he provides a translation (59), but his misinterpretation of the character *ji* 寂, which he sees as the character *bao* 寶, leads him to conclude that the images were commissioned by members of a local association of Lingbao 靈寶 Daoism. Although this could have been the case, the inscription bears no evidence in confirmation.

[22] 天尊一鋪/天寶九/載五月/扈靈寂/奉為臨/邛郡白/雲觀口/亡師主/三洞/道士賈/光宗造。

[23] The role of this prominent Daoist deity as savior of the deceased is attested since the period of the Sui dynasty, and its iconographic features seem to have been standardized definitively by the Tang dynasty. See Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism*, 201–204.

[24] The heads of the ten Tianzun at Xuanmiao guan are framed by nimbuses; they wear long official robes and hold accessories, unfortunately difficult to discern given the poor state of preservation of the statues. The same Xuanmiao guan also houses a majestic eighth-century image of the Jiuku tianzun standing on nine dragons (*Jiukutianzun cheng jiulong* 救苦天尊乘九龍). See Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism*, 202–204.

images were incorporated among preexisting Buddhist icons dating back to the reign of Empress Wu Zetian. Thus, the Feixian ge cliff evinces the traces of two different patterns of imperial religious patronage, motivated, on one hand, by Wu Zetian's pro-Buddhist policies and, on the other, by the pro-Daoist regime of Xuanzong. In my opinion, there can be no question here, of a "polytheistic" approach, or of a relaxation of orthodox iconography, as Sørensen has posited.[25] The Daoist motifs depicted on the cliffs were certainly not chosen at random, nor were they the fruit of the imagination of local artisans or worshippers. On the contrary, they appear to respect strict iconographic standards, as confirmed by the other extant, contemporaneous examples of similar icons depicted in the various sculptural sites of Sichuan.

We unfortunately have very little knowledge of the local history of these sites, their institutional background, and the networks of artisans who executed them. The geographical proximity of several of the major Daoist sites and their contemporaneous emergence leave little doubt that they enjoyed religious and artistic exchanges with one another as well as with the neighboring Buddhist sites. Still, many problems for art historical research remain: Under what circumstances were these sculptures produced? How were their motifs and dimensions determined? Were decisions to incorporate images within the cliffs' precincts taken under the authority of the adjacent temples and monasteries or that of local, lay organizations?

One knows, thanks to canonical texts and epigraphical materials, that during the Tang rivalry between the two religious communities for the control of sacred places often became contentious, in some cases seriously enough to require the arbitration of high functionaries or even of the emperor himself. An excellent example, from the famous stele at Mount Qingcheng 青城山 (Sichuan), is related in the edict (Qingchengshan Changdao guan chi bingbiao 青城山常道觀敕並表) issued in twelfth year of the Kaiyuan era (732) by Tang Xuanzong, which commemorates the reestablishment of the Changdao temple 常道觀, one of the most prominent Daoist sites. The temple had been taken over by Buddhist monks who turned it into the Feifu monastery 飛赴寺.[26] The edict,

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[25] Sørensen, "Buddhist Sculptures," 65–66.

[26] Franciscus Verellen, "'Evidential Miracles in Support of Taoism': The Inversion of Buddhist Apologetic Tradition in Late Tang China," *T'oung Pao* 78, no. 4–5

responding to a memorial submitted by a local Daoist and addressed to the governor of Yizhou 益州 (Chengdu) had the result that

> [t]he temple was restituted to the Daoists and the Buddhist monastery returned to its former place outside the mountain, whereby the Daoist and Buddhist sites were distinctly separated. (觀還道教，寺依山外舊所，使道佛兩所各有區分。)

Similar incidents of usurpation or profanation involving sacred images and disputes over the Daoist or Buddhist identity of the deities represented also arose frequently between the two religions during the Tang.[27]

In the case of the Feixian ge, the circumstances that made it possible for Daoist images to be introduced into an established Buddhist setting about half a century after the first groups of Buddhist statues were produced there appear to have been rather different. This Daoist "squatting" on Buddhist territory occurred during Tang Xuanzong's reign, when Daoism had been elevated to the status of a national religion, and it is plausible that the insertion of Daoist and Buddho-Daoist icons in the Feixian ge cliffs was instigated by the Daoist Taiqing temple 太清觀 established on nearby Mount Changqiu 長秋山, about ten kilometers east of the town of Pujiang.[28] Still extant today, this Daoist center was historically important and extolled above all as one of the twenty-four traditional dioceses (*zhi* 治 or *hua* 化) of the Heavenly Master organization, the Zhubu diocese 主簿治, named after the Han archivist (*zhubu*) Wang Xing 王興, who practiced self-cultivation on the mountain and became immortal there.[29] During Tang Xuanzong's reign, the Taiqing guan of mount Changqiu also became famous as the cult

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(1992): 258–316, 246–47; Zhang Xunliao 張勛燎 and Bai Bin 白彬, *Zhongguo daojiao kaogu* 中國道教考古 (Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 2006), 1847–1861. For a transcription of the stele, see Cai Dongzhou 蔡東洲 in Long Xianzhao 龍顯昭 and Huang Haide 黃海德, *Bashu daojiao beiwen jicheng* 巴蜀道教碑文集成 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 1997), 22–25.

[27] Verellen, "Evidential Miracles," 248.

[28] It belongs today to the village of Liuhe 六合村, Tianhua county 天華縣.

[29] See Du Guangting's 杜光庭 "Record of the Caverns-Heavens, Auspicious Sites, Holy Mountains, Marshes, and Famous Mountains" (*Dongtian fudi yuedu mingshan ji* 洞天福地嶽瀆名山記), dated 901, DZ 599, 14b.

center of a local female Daoist named Yang Zhengjian 楊正見, who, according to legend, ingested a *fuling* 茯苓 fungus after having been the disciple of a woman alchemist on the mountain for a few years and then "ascended to heaven in daylight," in other words, became immortal, in the year 732.[30] It is notable that it was during the same year 732 that the Daoist niche of the "Heavenly Venerable of Eternal Happiness" (長樂天尊) (niche 74) was carved in the main cliff of the Feixian ge. Mount Changqiu still bears traces of Yang Zhengjian's cult,[31] and also harbors Tang-period cliff sculptures, in particular a wall with ten still extant niches comprising about eighty statues. Like many other places in the region, the mountain was the focus of dedicated artistic endeavors during that time.

It should be added that the incorporation at the Feixian ge of Buddho-Daoist paired images within a Buddhist sculptural cliff is not unique in the region. Another example that may be briefly mentioned is to be found among the more than three thousand Buddhist images (some of which are Tantric) carved in the rocks of Zhengshan 鄭山, Danling 丹棱 county, only a dozen kilometers southeast of Pujiang. Here, in niche 48, one sees Śākyamuni and the Daoist Tianzun seated side by side, escorted respectively by two bodhisattvas and two *zhenren*, with a guardian on each side of the entrance (figure 17). The period to which the composition may be assigned is suggested by the nearby niche 48, whose inscription dates to 754.[32]

The Daoist Site of Niujiaozhai (Renshou)

A third sculptural site that sheds needed light on the flowering of Daoist art engendered by the Emperor Xuanzong's active support, as well as on the relationship between the two religions, is found at Niujiaozhai 牛角寨

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[30] See *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (comp. Li Fang 李昉 et al.; 978), chap. 64 (Nüxian 女仙, 9), ed. Wenshizhe chubanshe 文史哲出版社 (Taipei, 1981), 1:397–398. Also mentioned in Du Guangting's "Record of the Caverns-Heavens...." DZ 599, 14b.

[31] As I could see during a visit in October 2007, there still exists the pond where Yang Zhengjian was supposed to have drawn water, and her image is worshipped in a shrine located at the foot of the Taiqing temple.

[32] Hu Wenhe, *Sichuan daojiao*, 29.

in Renshou county 仁壽縣, central Sichuan, about thirty kilometers south of Chengdu. Located near a major Buddhist archeological site adorned with some fifteen hundred images, including a gigantic bust of the Buddha, this Daoist sculpted rock is today isolated in the middle of the fields and accessible only on foot (figure 18).

Due to the exceptional historical and artistic evidence it provides, and to its excellent state of preservation (at least until recently), the site aroused increasing interest after its discovery in 1982.[33] Among the four main niches cut in the different faces of the rock, it is niche 53 and above all its stele, dated 749, that contain information of the highest importance concerning Daoist textual history, and accordingly this has been the almost exclusive focus of scholars' attention. This large and deep niche (2.4 m high, 2.8 m wide, and 2.1 m deep), called the "Cave of the Three Treasures" (Sanbao kan 三寶龕), contains a remarkable group of some twenty-six statues (figures 19–20) created at about the same time as the stele at the entrance, which is dated to the "eighth year of the Tianbao era," that is, 749. Seated at the center of the niche, on square and lotus thrones, the Three Pure Ones, Sanqing 三清 (also representing the Three Treasures, Sanbao 三寶), with heads framed by haloes, are surrounded by guardians and attendants of both genders, some holding tablets (*hu*).

While the identification of these Sanqing (or Sanbao) deities is confirmed by the accompanying stele, the identity of the "fourth Tianzun," now headless, seated in the same pose upon a draped, square pedestal with an armrest in front of him, remains mysterious (figure 21). This fourth main figure is not aligned with the other three but is seated along the right wall of the cave, facing the stele dated to 749. Based on historical records asserting the presence of Tang imperial portrait-icons placed next to images of Laojun in official, state-sponsored Daoist temples throughout China, some scholars have proposed that the

[33] Deng Zhongyuan 鄧仲元 and Gao Junying 高俊英, "Renshouxian Niujiaozhai moya zaoxiang" 仁壽縣牛角寨摩崖造像 [Cliff Sculpture at Niujiaozhai, Renshou County], *Sichuan Wenwu* 5 (1990): 71–77. Thanks to the fact that it was completely buried, the site was preserved from pillage as well as from the vandalism of the Cultural Revolution. According to information received in 2007 from Professor Hu Wenhe, some of the statues have unfortunately been beheaded in recent years.

fourth *tianzun* of cave 53 is the deified Emperor Tang Xuanzong. If this were actually the case, this beheaded statue would be the only surviving image among the numerous icons of Xuanzong that were made and worshipped during his reign.[34] However, in my opinion, the fact that there is no mention at all of such a prestigious icon on the stele directly facing the statue lends little credibility to this hypothesis.

One final iconographic element in cave 53 is also worth noting. At the ground level, all along the plinth that stretches underneath the base of the Tianzuns' thrones, are relief depictions of standing donors divided into two groups facing an empty space that may have originally borne the image of a *boshan* incense burner. Seen from the perspective of the worshippers facing the statues, this division into two groups conforms to the traditional yin/yang, right/left bipolarity: the group to the left side is composed exclusively of men (including six *daoshi* followed by four devotees and a servant), while the right-hand group consists of a procession of twelve women preceded by three male figures and followed by a servant.

The stele, which bears the enigmatic title of "Record of the Southern Indian Temple" (*Nanzhu guan ji* 南竺觀記) (figure 22), regrettably provides only slight data concerning the creation and iconography of the Niujiaozhai site. Nevertheless, it indicates that the sculptures of the Cave of the Three Treasures (and hence the other main niches as well) were commissioned by three *daoshi* of the Three Grottoes (Sandong daoshi 三洞道士 and Sandong nü daoshi 三洞女道士) who had the same surname, Yang.[35] One of them, Yang Xingjing 楊行進, is male; the two others, Yang Zhengzhen 楊正真 and Yang Zhengguan 楊正觀, are female. Nothing is known about these local clerics, who could have been related to one another. It is also plausible that the two female *daoshi*

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[34] Liu Yang, "Cliff Sculpture: Iconographic Innovations of Tang Daoist Art in Sichuan Province," *Orientations* 28 (September 1997): 85–92, 91–93; "Images for the Temple: Imperial Patronage in the Development of Tang Daoist Art," *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 61, no. 2 (2001): 189–261, 242–243.

[35] For a transcription of the stele, see Long Xianzhao and Huang Haide, *Bashu daojiao*, 29–30; Hu Wenhe, *Zhongguo daojiao*, 2:169–170; and for a translation, see Florian C. Reiter, "The Taoist Canon of 749 A.D. at the 'Southern Indian Belvedere' in Jen-shou District, Szechwan Province," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 146 (1998): 111–124.

shared a religious affiliation (or even kinship) with Yang Zhengjian 楊正見, the legendary Daoist woman of the nearby mount Changqiu of Pujiang, who, as mentioned above, became "immortal" in 732, only seventeen years before the Niujiaozhai sculptures were created. The fact that the three women bear the same religious name, Zheng 正, seems indeed to indicate that they belonged to the same generation within their lineage. Information concerning the religious history of the region being limited to the epigraphy found in situ, we unfortunately have no further sources concerning the connections that certainly existed among its different sites, temples, and clerics.

The 749 stele does not mention the other three important Niujiaozhai niches, which, according to art historians, all date to the mid-eighth century.[36] One may deplore the fact that they have not yet been the objects of sustained study. The most spectacular of these three niches is the magnificent five-meter-long cave 64, which occupies the major part of what is now the front of the cliff (figures 23–24). Dedicated solely to Daoism, it features some thirty-five beautiful statues of human height (1.47 m) standing in two rows on small lotus thrones. The second row is entirely occupied by male figures, bearded Zhenren (or Tianzun) with flame-shaped aureoles alternating with beardless individuals, probably *daoshi*, with circular haloes. Some of them carry implements such as fans, incense burners, tablets, flasks, or scrolls. The first row of the composition distinctively alternates male and female figures, most of whose hands, unfortunately, are broken. Like the images to the rear, the male figures wear official garb and long three-pointed beards. The female figures are attired with sophisticated costumes and hairstyles, sporting high, square platform shoes and jewels.

The two remaining large niches are of particular interest to us owing to their singular, stunning blends of Buddhist and Daoist imagery. My examination of them remains tentative and focuses on the visual message they convey in respect to the Buddho-Daoist relationship.

Cave 47, the dimensions of which are nearly the same as those of cave 53,[37] shelters some twenty-five statues (about 1.36 m high) in two rows (twelve figures to the front, thirteen to the rear), standing on small

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[36] Hu Wenhe, *Sichuan daojiao*, 107; Hu Wenhe, *Zhongguo daojiao*, 2:170, 2:195.

[37] The dimensions are 2.25 meters high, 2.8 meters wide, and 2.20 meters deep. See Hu Wenhe, *Zhongguo daojiao*, 2:170, 2:209.

lotus-shaped pedestals, with, in addition, two guardians on each side of the entrance to the cave (figures 25–26). The two rows present a mix of Buddhist and Daoist deities, though, as some of them are damaged, they are difficult to identify. By my own count, it seems that they are represented in almost equal number: thirteen Buddhist and twelve Daoist figures.[38] One notices that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the first row, including three women, are all barefoot and those standing in the second row carry various accessories, such as a tablet, flask, willow twig, rope, or fan. As in cave 64, the Daoist figures in the composition wear high square platform shoes; the males are bearded, with long-sleeved official robes (one of them holds a fan), and the females wear the same type of shoes, elegant gowns, and chignons. Although the deities of the two religions are not arranged with perfect symmetry, it is nevertheless noticeable that, except for one Zhenren who is placed among the Buddhist figures at the extreme right in the front row, all the Daoist figures are concentrated *on the left side* and the bodhisattvas and Buddhas *on the right*, as seen from the perspective of the statues.

The last main Daoist/Buddhist niche, numbered 69, is carved on the right-hand side of what is now the front wall of the cliff. What we find here are not the usual twin seated images, as described above, but a standing trio about 1.40 meters in height: the Buddha Śākyamuni and two Daoist Tianzun (figure 27) arranged side by side on lotus pedestals. Adopting the deities' perspective, the barefoot Śākyamuni, easily recognized by his monastic robes and *uṣṇiṣa*, is standing to the right side of the cave, while its center and left are occupied by the two Tianzun with their Daoist garments, topknots and high square shoes. They are identified respectively as the Yuanshi Tianzun 元始天尊 and Taishang Laojun 太上老君.[39]

How should we interpret the iconology of these two Daoist/Buddhist caves? Regarding the positions of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in relation to the Daoist Tianzun and Zhenren, it is tempting to speculate that the iconographic message the artists and sponsors of the site intended to convey was Daoism's capacity not only to accept but even to embrace its great rival while affirming its supremacy over it. By placing

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[38] Hu Wenhe, *Zhongguo daojiao*, 2:209, mentions sixteen figures in the front row and thirteen in the rear.

[39] Hu Wenhe, *Zhongguo daojiao*, 2:209.

Buddhist deities next to their own, they demonstrated that Daoism could tolerantly integrate these alien deities into its pantheon, while nonetheless according them a subservient position. The right-hand position assigned to Śākyamuni in the trio of cave 69 might also be interpreted as denoting his lower status compared to that of the Daoist Tianzun; for, as we shall see, the right is traditionally considered inferior to the left in Daoist theology. This convention was also adopted in cave 47, discussed above, where the Buddhist figures were gathered to the right of the Daoist statues.

No inscription has survived in either of these two caves. Assuming that they were created together with the Cave of the Three Treasures (number 53), we must rely once more on the 749 "Record of the Southern Indian Temple" stele in any attempt to discern the religious motives of those who sponsored the artwork at the site. Valued as an exceptional document by historians of Daoism, the short table of contents it supplies of a (locally available) Daoist canon offers a clue for our understanding.[40] Among the scriptures listed in this "Catalogue of the repository of the scriptures in thirty-three sections" (*Sanshiliu bu jingzang mu* 三十六部經藏目), one finds the notorious (and no longer extant) *Book of the Conversion of the Barbarians* (*Huahujing* 化胡經), allegedly written by Wang Fu 王浮 around 300,[41] and subsequently diffused in various expanded and modified versions. The *huahu* theory it propounded was at the core of the several virulent debates between the two great religions that were organized at court. During the Tang dynasty, these palace disputations multiplied and the fickle policies of the ruling house with respect to the two traditions exacerbated their mutual competition for imperial patronage. The Tang emperors appear to have opted for an unstable compromise between the maintenance of Buddhism, which was powerfully implanted and prospered at all levels of society, and their unconditional support for Daoism due to their

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[40] Hu Wenhe, "Renshou xian tanshen yan di 53 hao 'Sanbao' ku youbi 'Nanzhuguan ji' zhong Daozang jingmu yanjiu" 仁壽縣壇神巖第53號「三寶」窟右壁「南竺觀記」中道藏經目研究, *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 世界宗教研究2 (1998): 118–128; Reiter, "Taoist Canon;" Liu Yi, "Tangdai daojiao," 117–120.

[41] On the *Huahu jing* and the *huahu* controversies, see Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 2 vols. (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1959), 288–320.

legendary ancestral affiliation with Laozi. The imperial line bore the family name Li, Laozi's surname, and accordingly they deemed themselves to be descended from the sage. Daoist tales of the conversion of the barbarians became the expressions of a campaign of humiliation that escalated into a vehement offensive against Buddhism. To stigmatize and dismiss their rival, the Daoists insisted above all on Buddhism's foreign origins. Polemics pro and contra the conversion of the barbarians continued to nurse quarrels between the two religions, but also served as a pretext underwriting the sinocentric, and even nationalistic, position of the government.

Despite this, the checkered destiny of the *Huahu jing* echoes to a large extent the shifting religious policies of the Tang. To assuage the Buddhists who declared the book spurious and offensive to their teaching, emperor Gaozong 高宗 (649–683), early in the history of the dynasty, ordered the destruction of all copies of the text, which had, by then, expanded into no fewer than ten *juan*.[42] Some decades later, however, the book resurfaced, only to be once again officially banned by an edict issued by Tang Zhongzong 中宗 (r. 705–710) during the first year of his reign, in 705.[43] Titled "Prohibition of the *Huahu jing*" (*Jin Huahu jing chi* 禁化胡經敕), this edict not only threatened to punish anyone who would attempt to circulate the *Huahu jing* itself or any work including allusions to the "conversion of the barbarians" topic but also condemned the depiction of *huahu* images, which, judging from the edict, seem to have been widespread in China at the time. If we are to believe its authors, "*all* the Daoist temples of the Empire exhibit images representing [Laozi] transformed into the Buddha converting the barbarians" (天下諸道觀皆畫化胡成佛變相).[44]

This drastic measure, however, did not succeed in definitively halting the diffusion of the subversive work. Less than half a century after the promulgation of the edict of 705, the perennial *Huahu jing*, under the Daoist regime of Tang Xuanzong, was elevated to a position of favor. Together with other current anti-Buddhist scriptures, it was

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[42] See the chronological table of the *Huahu* literature in Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豊, *Dôkyô to Bukkyô* 道教と佛教 (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankokai, 1976), vol. 3, 59–60.

[43] Weinstein, *Buddhism*, 47–48.

[44] *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 17:2b–3a, ed. Zhonghua shuju, 202–203.

introduced into the new Daoist canon compiled in the capital, Chang'an, during the Kaiyuan era at the Emperor's order.[45] Given the catalogue one finds in the Renshou stele of 749, it is clear that the scripture also enjoyed canonical status in Sichuan at about the same time. Like the other Daoist works mentioned on the stele, a copy of it was probably stored in a nearby monastery to which the three Daoists named Yang belonged. Whether or not this monastery was the "Southern Indian Temple," Nanzhu guan 南竺觀, to which the stele refers and whose very name possibly alludes to the *huahu* episode, remains an open question.

The Religion of the Left and the Religion of the Right

These remarks on the *Huahu jing* and its ideology lead us back to a basic iconographic question, namely, how should we understand the relative placement of Śākyamuni and the Daoist Tianzun in the twin compositions as well as that of the deities in other Daoist/Buddhist groups? With the exception of niche 2 of the Feixian ge, mentioned above, and other rare cases, for instance at Liuzui 劉嘴 (Danling 丹陵), all the Śākyamuni/Tianzun niches that we have surveyed feature the two in the same spatial relationship: the Buddha is always placed to the right-hand side of Laojun (Tianzun) and the same left/right division applies also to the groups of Daoist and Buddhist figures in caves 64 and 69 at the Niujiaozhai, Renshou. Moreover, this yin/yang, left/right partition remains constant for the depictions of male and female donors, as, for example, in cave 53 of Renshou. In these instances, however, it must be emphasized that the donors do not share the same orientation as the deities, whose perspective is from the inside looking out. In contrast, the donors, like worshippers or observers facing the deities, stand on the outside looking in. The male portraits are therefore logically incised on the left (yang) side and the female ones on the right (yin) side of the plinth.

Far from being arbitrary, this left/right iconographic convention appears to be based on a sustained doctrinal theory that was posited by early medieval Daoism as a means to define its relationship with its great rival. A foretaste of this theory was already offered in the strange

[45] Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1:25.

but well-known story of the Perfected of the Mystery of the Left 左玄真人 and the Perfected of the Mystery of the Right 右玄真人 related in the ancient "Lingbao Scripture of Wisdom, Fixing the Will and Penetrating the Sublime" (*Zhihui dingzhi tongwei jing* 智慧定志通微經 ; ca. 400). The text narrates the mission of these two Zhenren who were sent by the Heavenly Venerable to preach respectively Daoism and Buddhism. It also reveals, in the manner of a Buddhist *avadāna*, that in a former lifetime the pair formed a married couple, the Perfected of the Left being the husband and the Perfected of the Right, the wife. Daoism (associated with the left/male/yang) and Buddhism (with the right/female/yin) are thus considered here as "two ways leading to one goal" (*er tu gui yi* 二塗歸一).[46] Over time, Daoist orthodoxy became more defensive, with the result that this inclusive approach to the left and right tended to be abandoned in favor of a more confrontational position. Contemporaneous to the Yaowang shan steles, the fifth-century *Santian neijie jing* 三天內解經 (*Inner Explanations of the Three Heavens*; DZ 1205), in line with its interest in proselytism, demarcated the two religious traditions and asserted their intrinsic hierarchical distinction by relying on one of the fundamental principles of the Chinese cosmological system, the complementary opposition of yin and yang. In a passage relating Laozi's birth, obviously patterned after popular Jātaka tales dedicated to the Buddha's life, Daoism and Buddhism are respectively associated with the left (yin) and right (yang), a postulate that conveniently explains the Chinese religion's primacy:

> Laozi is the Lord of living transformations; Śākyamuni is the Lord of transformation by death. As a result, Laozi was born from his mother's left armpit, and is the Lord of the left. The left is the side of the yang pneumas that govern the Azure Palace with the Registers of Life. Śākyamuni was born from his mother's right armpit and is the Lord of the right. The right is the side of yin pneumas and the black records of the Registers of Death. In this respect the differences between the teachings of Laozi and Śākyamuni are those between the laws of left and right. The transforming

[46] DZ 325, 17a–18a. See Erik Zürcher, "Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism: A Survey of Scriptural Evidence," *T'oung Pao* 68 (1980): 1–75, 90–91; Seidel, "Le Sûtra merveilleux," 334–335; Bokenkamp, "Yao Boduo Stele," 66; and Ursula-Angelika Cedzich, in Schipper and Verellen, *Taoist Canon*, 1:226–227.

> influences of the left accord with the palace of the left, so that the pneumas of life cause the adept's entire body to rise and fly off in transcendence. The transforming influences of the right accord with the palace of right, so that the pneumas of death cause the adept to pass through oblivion and be reborn.... Yet it is said the right is not so good as the left.[47]

The message is clear: the left (yang) being better than the right (yin), Daoism's ethnic and cultural superiority over its rival is undeniable.

The disparagement of Buddhism implied by these Daoist elaborations could not have left the sangha indifferent. It was within the framework of medieval interreligious debates that the Buddhists' indignation toward this divisive theory was articulated. One of the most ancient of the numerous anti-Daoist treatises, the sixth century *Xiaodao lun* 笑道論 (Laughing at the Dao), furnishes substantial evidence of the Buddhist counterattack. Faithful to his strategy throughout the tract, its author, Zhen Luan 甄鸞, quotes Daoist texts in order to denounce their doctrinal weaknesses and aberrations. Section 8 of the *Xiaodao lun*, pointedly titled "The Buddha Was Born in the West, in Yin," for example, offers a passage from a *Laozi xu* 老子序 (Introduction to the *Laozi*), where one is reminded that Daoism is associated with the yang and Buddhism with the yin, along with their correlates (east/west, wood/metal, father/mother, heaven/earth, life/death, etc.), an excellent expedient to relegate the "religion of the right" to a second-rate status:

> Daoism originated in the east and corresponds to the realm of wood and of yang. Buddhism originated in the west and corresponds to the realm of metal and of yin. Taoism is thus the father; Buddhism the mother. Daoism is heaven; Buddhism is earth. Daoism is life, Buddhism is death. Daoism is the cause of things. Buddhism is their effect. Together they form a couple of yin and yang and cannot be separated. Buddhism originated from Daoism.[48]

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[47] *Santian neijie jing* 三天內解經 (DZ 1205, 1.9b), translation by Bokenkamp, "Yao Boduo Stele," 195. See, too, the slightly different translations of Zürcher, "Buddhist Influence," 95–96, and Livia Kohn, *God of the Dao: Lord Lao in History and Myth* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies, 1998), 241.

[48] Translation by Livia Kohn, *Laughing at the Tao: Debates among Buddhists and Taoist in Medieval China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 79–80.

The xenophobic dimension of this Daoist yin/yang, left/right theory is further denounced by Zhen Luan through a citation from the *Laozi Huahu jing*:

> Buddhism first arose in the barbarian countries. Because the western region belongs to the energy of metal, people there are harsh and lack proper rites.[49]

The doctrine of "the religions of the left and the right" propagated by medieval Daoist theologians and categorically rejected by their Buddhist opponents could not have been forgotten when, a few centuries later, the Daoist/Buddhist sculptures of Sichuan were made. The left/right iconographic orientation that they adopted for placing the two most prestigious deities of the Buddhist and the Daoist pantheons was no doubt inspired by the pro-*huahu* ideology prevalent at the time both in Daoist circles and in the highest imperial spheres.

Was this iconographic convention, with its *huahu* connotations, already in the minds of the sculptors of the Yaoxian votive steles when they depicted Śākyamuni and Laojun side by side? Elements of an answer have been given by Stanley Abe, who insightfully proposed that it is possible that the right and left positions ascribed to the two deities in one of these steles (the Feng Shenyu 馮神育 stele) could denote "a counter-attack on the part of the lay Buddhists who, faced with works such as the Yao Boduo stele [depicting the Buddha and Laojun in the reverse position], retaliated against the *huahu* theory through a work which represented Daoist deities as nothing more than forms of Buddhist ones."[50] Confirmation of Abe's hypothesis, which seems prima facie to be plausible, must await further analysis of the Yaoxian steles.

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[49] *Xiaodao lun* 笑道論, sec. 21, "Buddhist Deviant Teachings Disturb the Political Order," translation by Kohn, *Laughing at the Tao*, 110. She mentions that this is an unclear citation from the fourth-century *Huahu jing*. See also Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 305–306.

[50] Abe, "Heterological Visions," 80. The Yao Boduo 姚伯多 stele from Yaoxian is dated to 496; see Bokenkamp, "Yao Boduo Stele," 59.

Concluding Remarks

The magnificent Daoist sites of Sichuan that we have surveyed remind us that, from the beginning of the first millennium, the region enjoyed especially privileged ties to Daoism. Above all, however, these monuments were the result of the extraordinary impetus that Daoist art received under Tang Xuanzong's rule. It was no hazard of circumstance that such large-scale Daoist sculptural projects as the Xuanmiao guan and the Niujiaozhai were completed almost simultaneously—the first in 748 and the second just a year later—in the mid-eighth century. Besides those that I have discussed in this essay, other major Daoist sculptural sites also arose at the same time in the region. I am thinking in particular of the cliff of Longtuowan 龍拖灣 on the northern slope of the aforementioned Mount Changqiu near Pujiang and the site of Mount Longhu 龍鵠山 in Danling with its fifty-three niches dating to around 750 according to the stele found in situ.[51] During this same year, 750, as we have seen above, Daoist images were incorporated among the Buddhist sculptures at the Feixian ge in Pujiang.

The final third of Xuanzong's forty-four-year-long mandate, during which time these thousands of Daoist statues were carved in Sichuan, has often been rightly termed the "golden age of Daoism." It was marked by a series of unprecedented measures initiated by the emperor to support his favored religion's clergy, art, and institutions. The effervescence of Daoist artistic activity in Sichuan was, in fact, shortly preceded by several of the most momentous activities, among them,

- The imperial decree of 741 ordering the establishment of an empire-wide network of Ancestral Temples of the Emperor of Mysterious Origin (Xuanyuan Huangdi miao) dedicated to Laozi, together with their affiliated Academies of Daoist Studies (Chongxuan xue 崇玄學) where candidates for the civil service could train for the newly instituted examination in Daoism (*daoju* 道舉)

[51] According to Hu Wenhe, *Sichuan daojiao*, 28, the cliff was carved between 742 and 755. See also Liu Changjiu, *Zhongguo xinan shiku yishu*, 45, and Hu Wenhe, *Zhongguo daojiao*, 2:30. The stele found in niche 24 is titled "Inscription of the Cypress," *Songbo zhi ming* 松柏之銘. For transcriptions of the text, see Chen Yuan, *Daojia jinshilue*, 143–144; *Bashu daojiao beiwen jicheng* (1997): 30–32; Hu Wenhe, *Sichuan daojiao*, 6; and Hu Wenhe, *Zhongguo daojiao*, 2:34–45.

- The name change, in 742, of the dynastic era to Tianbao, a move prompted by Laozi's epiphany and the discovery of a jade portent bearing the inscription "Heavenly Treasure Thousand Years" (*Tianbao qianzai* 天寶千載)[52]
- The upgrading, in 743, of the names of the state-sponsored Daoist Ancestral Temples and the constitution of a complex Daoist state liturgy at the Emperor's request[53]
- The innovation of a large-scale imperial iconographic program stipulating that Xuanzong's image should be placed next to the icons of Laojun and worshipped in imperial Daoist temples throughout the country[54]

When Xuanzong's personal involvement in Daoism culminated four years later, in 748, through his initiation into the highest Daoist rank by the Shangqing patriach Li Hanguang 李含光 (683–769)—the successor to the noted Daoist Master Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎 (647–735)[55]—Daoism had already fully benefited from this unparalleled imperial recognition and effectively attained the status of a national religion.

The paired images and other Daoist/Buddhist compositions found at the Xuanmiao guan, the Niujiaozhai, and the Feixian ge make up only a handful of local examples. However, they demonstrate that a specific iconography emerged in an exceptional politico-religious context and

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[52] Benn, "Religious Aspects," 132–133; Weinstein, *Buddhism*, 168–169n26; Timothy H. Barrett, *Taoism under the T'ang: Religion and Empire during the Golden Age of Chinese History* (London: Wellsweep, 1996), 62–65.

[53] The Xuanyuan Temples of Chang'an and Luoyang, respectively, became Taiqing gong 太清宮 and Taiwei gong 太微宮, and those in the provinces became Ziji gong 紫極宮. See Victor Xiong, "Ritual Innovations and Taoism Under Tang Xuanzong," *T'oung Pao* 82, no. 4–5 (1996): 258–316; Ge Zhaoguang, "Zuizhong de qufu: Guanyu Kaiyuan Tianbao shiqi de daojiao," in *Tangdai zongjiao xinyang yu shehui* (Beijing daxue sheng Tang yanjiu congshu), ed. Rong Xinjiang (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2003), 13–34.

[54] Benn, "Religious Aspects," 137–139; Liu Yang, "Images for the Temple" (2001): 189–261.

[55] Xuanzong subsequently received the Register of the River Chart (*Hetu lu* 河圖籙). See Schipper and Verellen, *Taoist Canon*, 595; Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism*, 165–168.

that this may have been prevalent at the time throughout the empire. In comparison, it is noteworthy that there is no trace whatsoever of this iconography at the major Daoist sculptural site of the Yunüquan 玉女泉 (Mount Xishan 西山) in Mianyang 綿陽, about 150 kilometers north of Chengdu, that was constructed during the Sui (589–618) and the beginning of the Tang.[56]

As a general rule, whenever an iconography is determined by religious orthodoxy, which is itself subject to political ideology, the latitude left to artistic freedom is limited. Although representing a moderate, "ecumenical" form of the *huahu* ideology, the imagery we have considered appears sufficiently suggestive for us to imagine the provocative character it had at the time of its production. We must not forget that less than half a century before, *huahu* depictions had been officially and severely forbidden in China. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the exhibition of Śākyamuni and Laojun side by side would not have been possible without imperial consent.

[56] This site is also known as one of the twenty-four dioceses (*zhi*) of the Tianshi dao.

Appendix

Fig. 1–2 : Wei Wenlang 魏文朗 stele (front), dated 424, Yaoxian Detail Laojun and Śākyamuni Buddha (fig. 1 from Zhang Yan and Zhao Chao; fig. 2 [1992] and all subsequent photographs are by the author.)

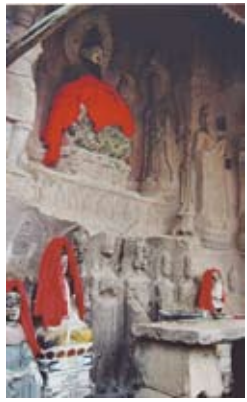

Fig. 3: Laojun kan 老君龕 (Niche 11), Xuanmiao guan 玄妙觀, Anyue 安岳 (2001)

Fig. 4: Jiuku tianzun 救苦天尊 (Niche 62), Xuanmiao guan, Anyue (2001)

Fig. 5–6: Two small niches with the Buddha and Laojun, Xuanmiao guan, Anyue (2001)

Fig. 7: Śākyamuni/Laojun (90 cm in height), Xuanmiao guan, Anyue, Niche 63 (2001)

Fig. 8–9: Niche 75, Xuanmiao guan, Anyue. Detail Śākyamuni/Laojun (56 cm in height) (2001)

Fig. 10: The 748 C.E. stele of the Xuanmiao guan, Anyue (2001)

Fig. 11: Buddhist cliff carvings of the Feixian Pavillion 飛仙閣, Pujiang 蒲江 (2007)

Fig. 12: Laojun/Buddha (niche 2) Feixian ge, Pujiang (2007)

Fig. 13: Buddha/Laojun, Feixian ge, North Cliff (niche 18) (2007)

Fig. 14: Feixian ge, niche 74: the Heavenly Venerable of Eternal Happiness (長樂天尊) with inscription dated 732 (2007)

Fig. 15–16: The Seven Buddhas (Niche 45) and the Ten Daoist Tianzun. Detail of the Ten Tianzun with inscription dated 750 (niche 44) Feixian ge (2007)

Fig. 17: Buddha/Laojun, Zhengshan 鄭山 (Danling 丹棱) Niche 38 (2004)

Fig. 18: The Daoist cliff of Niujiaozhai 牛角寨 , Renshou county 仁壽縣 (2004)


Fig. 19–20: Niche 53, Niujiaozhai, Renshou. Detail of the Three Pure Ones (2004)

Fig. 21: The headless "Tianzun" of the Sanbao kan, Niujiaozhai, Renshou (2004)

Fig. 22: Stele of niche 53, Niujiaozhai, Renshou, dated 749 (2004)

Fig. 23–24: Niche 64, Niujiaozhai, Renshou. Detail (2004)

Fig. 25–26: Niche 47, Niujiaozhai, Renshou. Detail (2004)

Fig. 27: Niche 69, Niujiaozhai, Renshou (2004)

從人物造像看佛道關係：唐玄宗時期的四川懸崖雕刻

穆瑞明 (Christine Mollier)

摘 要

本文將重點研究在四川省懸崖上發現的一種特別的佛道混合造像。本文主要考察三個地區的視像及碑文，這些地區因出現釋迦摩尼與老君(或為天尊)或者其他道士與僧侶的成對人物像而著名。它們分別是：安岳玄妙觀的道教懸崖，蒲江飛仙閣的佛教懸崖，以及仁壽縣牛角寨的道教懸崖。重要的是，經過對這些石碑及雕像的年代考察，發現這些佛道混合造像都產生自同一時期，即尊道教為國教的唐玄宗統治時期(公元712–756年)。這些地區性的雕像也清楚反映了這一時期的政治宗教意識形態。這裏要提出的一個假設：這種獨特的佛道混合造像可被視為是那個時代《化胡經》重新興盛的視覺表達。所有的碑銘和肖像畫皆在支持這一假說。這些組合中，佛教和道教的神像都是相同尺寸且呈現系統性的排列，但它們的位置排列都遵循一個原則，即佛像一直被放在道像的右面，這也暗示了將道教置於佛教之上的意圖。這種左/右的排列方式並非出於武斷，而是遵循了陽性宗教在左、陰性宗教在右的原則，這一原則由早期道教提出，用以定義其與佛教的關係。在《化胡經》被禁的不到五十年時間，釋迦摩尼和老君的形象被並排放置，雖然這些人物像看起來非常溫和並且舉止尋常，但若不是因為唐玄宗扶持道教的特定時代背景，這樣的並排放置永遠不會出現。

關鍵詞：道教、石窟造像、四川、唐玄宗、化胡